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Connecticut General Assembly: Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106
APPtestimony@cga.ct.gov

Dear State Senators and Representatives:

My name is Tom Piezzo and I live in New Haven. I have been a librarian in CT since 2004 and during that time have been privileged to work with countless remarkable patrons, inspiring community organizations, stalwart colleagues, and dedicated public officials. I am fortunate in that the best measure of success in my profession is how much I can give, rather than take, on any particular day. Common throughout so much of my experience has been the support of the Connecticut State Library, in their provision of databases, delivery of books and other materials, negotiation of group discounts (along with the CLC), free internet for libraries through the CEN, and professional development and training for library workers.

You received a fact sheet today reading: "Protect Equal Access - Preserve Our Funding!" and "No New Cuts." On the back were "100 Amazing Things You'll Find at Connecticut Libraries." It would be easy to talk for well over our allotted three minutes about each one of those. I'd like to speak about Computer Access and Instruction (numbers 15 and 16).

Free and equal provision of information is a core mission of libraries, and as the format of information changes, so too must the methods of access. We add to, rather than replace, the ways we help patrons, and even a full generation into the digital age, I daily assist users of all ages, educational attainment, economic status, and social abilities. Be it in the basics of assessing the results of an internet search, setting up email or social media, puzzling through the latest operating systems, or general technical troubleshooting, the public library is the only place where the community can go for free assistance, often seven days a week, after business hours. Unless we ensure our public can equip themselves with the new expertise needed to find information, it is increasingly of little use for us to store it for them.

The Connecticut State Library's Division of Library Development, and the CT Library Consortium (whose operating budget derives from the State Library) offer library professionals a wide range classes to learn, formally, new technological skills, and then pass along that information, authoritatively, to patrons. The Connecticut Education Network offers free internet to all public libraries, so we can readily afford the means of connectivity for patrons. These patrons many times lack the skills, or personal finances, to own and operate what is needed to download a credit report, or apply for a job online, or research their ancestry, or connect with far-away loved ones. But after sustaining a series of budget cuts in the past eight years totaling a 25% decrease, I can't see how the State Library can continue to aid in these initiatives if they lose any more funding. That means local libraries will have less to give, and at a time when our public has come to rely on us – the only place for free and equal access. So please consider who will ultimately feel the effects of any further budget cuts, and how many fewer options for an informed life they will have without adequately funded libraries.

Thank you for your attention, and for your service to the State of Connecticut.

Tom Piezzo